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ST. GEORGE AND MITHRA 'THE CATTLE-THIEF'

By FRANZ CUMONT

Since the time of Edward III, St. George has been the patron-saint of England, and his fight with the dragon is familiar wherever the gold sovereign has been in circulation. As a special guardian of soldiers, this hero of the Faith has won a world-wide fame: his achievements have inspired innumerable artists and have produced a whole literature of edifying stories in many tongues. But the oldest legend of the Cappadocian martyr is so wild a fable, so utterly devoid not only of truth but of plausibility, that the great wonder-worker himself has sometimes been regarded—in my opinion wrongly—as purely mythical.[1] The paucity of authentic information in the hagiographical writings increases the value for the historian of such popular traditions as are connected with his cult.

Père Peeters, for whom the religions of Armenia and Georgia hold no secrets, has called my attention to a curious custom which survived until modern times at the Monastery of Ilori, in Mingrelia at the foot of the Caucasus. Even so late as the middle of the nineteenth century,[2] every year on the Festival of St. George, to whom the church of the monastery was dedicated, an ox mysteriously entered the building ready for sacrifice. So far as I am aware, the most detailed account of this annual miracle is that given by the French traveller, Jean Chardin, who visited Ilori in 1672, and I may perhaps be allowed to quote the passage in full; for its historical value is far greater than its author could have suspected.

[SUR LES FÊTES DES MINGRÉLIENS[3]]

> Le 21 Octobre, ils font la Fête du miracle que *St. George* fit dans leur pays, en faveur d'un Payen étranger, qui étoit venu de plus de cent lieuës loin, dont voici l'histoire. Du tems que l'Église Grecque étoit unie avec la Latine & que ce glorieux Martyr faisoit beaucoup de miracles, ce Payen à qui on les racontoit

[1] I have discussed the *Acts of St. George*, and their Judaeo-mazdean sources, in the *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, cxiv, 1936, 5–41.

[2] J. Bartholomaei, *Lettres numismatiques et archéologiques relatives à la Transcaucasie* (St. Petersburg, 1859), 72: 'Vous connaissez sans doute la légende de l'apparition annuelle, *de nos jours encore*, au couvent d'Ilori du boeuf miraculeux qui arrive toujours à point nommé pour la fête de St. Georges pour se faire sacrifier à ce saint.' The occurrence is also mentioned in the *Description de la Géorgie par le Tsarevitch Wakhoucht*, published by Brosset (St. Petersburg, 1842), on p. 400: 'Sur le rivage à l'ouest de l'Egris est l'église de St. Georges d'Ilori. Le 10 Novembre de chaque année, il y vient un boeuf que l'on tue et que le roi partage avec ses grands. Cette église, qui opérait plus de miracles qu'on ne peut le croire, fut brulée en 1733.' Brosset in *Voyage archéologique dans la Géorgie et dans l'Armenie*, VIII[e] Rapport (St. Petersburg, 1849), 98, describes a large icon, preserved at Ilori, showing various scenes from the legend of St. George, and this icon was reproduced by the Countess Ouvaroff [Ouvarova] in *Matériaux relatifs à l'archéologie du Caucase*, iii (Moscow, 1893), pl. x. But in these two works there is no mention of the custom still to be observed in Bartholomaei's time.

[3] *Voyage de monsieur le Chevalier Chardin en Perse et autres lieux de l'Orient* (Amsterdam, 1711), vol. i, ch. xxii, p. 78 f.

n'en pouvoit rien croire. Et comme les Chrétiens l'exhortoient à n'être pas obstiné, mais à croire ce que des gens lui en assuroient, il leur dit ; je croirai les miracles que vous me racontez de votre Saint, si, avant demain il me fait apporter chez moi un tel de mes boeufs, qu'il leur marqua. Sur quoi le Saint fit que la nuit suivante ce boeuf se trouva porté de plus de cent lieuës loin dans cet endroit-là, qui est celui où est l'Eglise qui lui est consacrée au village des Issoriens, & où ce Payen, à la grande consolation des Chrétiens, reçut le Baptême. On tua le boeuf & on le partagea au peuple, qui étoit accouru en foule voir cette aventure miraculeuse. Les Mingréliens, pour conserver la mémoire de ce miracle, fait au tems que la foi florissoit chez eux, obligent tous les ans un peu avant la fête, un de ceux qui aspirent à la Prêtrise, de dérober un boeuf, le plus beau qu'il peut trouver, pour & au nom de St. *George*, qui, à ce qu'ils tiennent, enlève un boeuf tous les ans, à pareil jour & le pose au même lieu en mémoire de cet ancien miracle. Ce qui fait que quinze jours auparavant il faut bien garder ses boeufs, parce que chacun sous le nom de *St. George* en dérobe où il peut, & toujours les plus beaux, en disant : *si St. George dérobe bien un boeuf, nous en pouvons bien dérober aussi*. Sur quoi chacun pense pouvoir dérober impunément. Il y a plusieurs Grecs & quelques uns de nos Pères, qui ont pris soin de découvrir de quelle manière se faisoit ce faux miracle du boeuf, ou pour mieux dire cette fourberie, veillant pour cela toute la nuit, & rôdant à l'entour de l'Eglise. Ils ont trouvé qu'on l'y fait entrer, à l'entrée de la nuit, & qu'on le tire de dedans avec des cordes. La plûpart des Evêques savent la fourberie, & que ce prétendu miracle annuel est une pure imposture ; mais ils y connivent, pour entretenir la dévotion du peuple, lequel (chose qu'il faut observer) n'a garde de s'approcher de l'Eglise la nuit du miracle, parce qu'on lui fait accroire qu'il mouroit, & que le Saint tuë quiconque approche de son Eglise en ce tems-là . . . La veille de la Fête, le Prince accompagné du Catholicos, des Evêques, & de toute la Noblesse, se rend à l'Eglise, & visite dedans, pour voir s'il n'y a point de boeuf caché, & puis il la ferme, apposant lui-même son seau sur la porte ; & le matin il revient avec la même compagnie, reconnoit son seau, ouvre la porte de l'Eglise & y trouve le boeuf qu'ils disent que le Saint a dérobé cette nuit-là, & y a mis. Là-dessus tout le monde fait retentir l'air d'acclamations. Aussi-tôt un jeune homme, destiné à cet Office, ayant une coignée à la main, aportée exprès, & qui ne sert à autre chose, traîne le boeuf hors de l'Eglise, le tuë, & le coupe en plusieurs parts. Le Prince prend la première ; & la seconde et la troisième s'envoyent par des Couriers, l'une au Roi d'Imirette, & l'autre au Prince de Guriel. On en donne ensuite aux Seigneurs de Mingrélie . . . Il y a beaucoup de gens qui mangent de cette chair sur le champ, avec grande ardeur & dévotion, ni plus ni moins que si c'étoit la Communion. D'autres la salent & le font sécher au feu, espérant d'être guéris de leurs maladies, s'ils en mangent lorsqu'ils sont allitez. Quand on tuë le boeuf, on observe soigneusement comment il est fait, & ses mouvemens, pour en tirer des augures. Par exemple, si le boeuf ne veut pas se laisser prendre, s'il se démène & bat des cornes, ils disent qu'il y aura guerre cette année-là. S'il est crotté, c'est signe de fertilité, & d'abondance. S'il est mouillé, c'est qu'il y aura beaucoup de vin. S'il est roux, cela présage mortalité parmi les hommes & les chevaux ; mais c'est un bon signe, s'il est d'autre couleur. Et quoique tous les ans ils soient trompez à ces prédictions, ils sont toûjours aussi superstitieux & aussi crédules que devant.

The origin of this sacrifice, which survived in Mingrelia through the ages, is so obviously pagan that it would be tedious to argue the point. The whole of the beliefs which it implies have come down from antiquity with remarkably little change ; and their persistence has a parallel in the Christianity of this region, where animal-sacrifice

has gone on without interruption until our own time.[4] If the people of Ilori 'closely watched the condition of the ox and its movements to gather omens therefrom,' the reason is that the appearance and behaviour of the victim led to death had a significance in the science of divination among the ancients.[5] And the reason why they ate the flesh of this particular ox 'with great devotion, neither more nor less than if it were the Communion,' and kept it as an effective medicine, is that the flesh of an offering consecrated to the gods is itself divine (or rather endowed with magical properties) and works as a potent charm.[6]

So too the miracle of the animal coming every year of its own accord to be sacrificed is of a piece with the purest tradition of paganism, in which there was a very general belief that the victim led to the altar should approach it willingly and thus show its acquiescence in the sequel. If it resisted, or, worse still, if it escaped, the ceremony could not go on.[7] There is no lack of recorded cases in which animals were supposed to have offered themselves spontaneously to the sacrificial knife,[8] and instances are quoted from Asia Minor. At Pedasa in Caria a she-goat, starting a long way off, led the priest who held its halter through the crowd of onlookers up to the temple of Zeus Askraios, where it was to be slaughtered.[9] A portent which made a great impression occurred during the siege of Cyzicus by Mithridates.[10] During the festival of Proserpina a black cow left its pasture, swam the sea, and galloped from the city-gate to the altar of the goddess, where it stopped and so enabled the traditional rite to be performed. Nearer to Mingrelia, when Lucullus was crossing the Euphrates on his campaign against Mithridates, there happened a remarkable incident which was taken as a good omen. The sacred cows of Anaïtis, the Persian Artemis, were grazing at large on the far side of the river. These animals, which were kept for sacrifice, were caught, not without difficulty, as they were needed; but when the

[4] On the *matal* in the Armenian church, *cf.* Conybeare, *Rituale Armenorum* (Oxford, 1905), 65 ff. According to information which Père Peeters has been kind enough to send me, this institution, perhaps of Aramaean origin, is found also in Georgia, where it bears the Greek name 'agape.' Chardin (*op. cit.* ch. xxi, p. 73; *cf.* p. 76) describes in detail the rites employed in Mingrelia at these animal-sacrifices and at the offerings which were made on tombs.

[5] Bouché-Leclercq, *Histoire de la divination*, i, 149 ff.; iii, 100. *Cf.* Strabo xi, 4, 7, 503 (on the human sacrifices of the Albanians of Caucasus): πεσόντος δὲ (τοῦ ἱεροδούλου) σημειοῦνται μαντεῖά τινα ἐκ τοῦ πτώματος καὶ εἰς τὸ κοινὸν ἀποφαίνουσι.

[6] For pieces of the victim kept as talismans *cf.* Robertson Smith, *Religion of the Semites*[3], 381 ff.

[7] For Greece, *cf.* Saglio-Pottier, *Dict. ant. s.v.* 'Sacrificium,' p. 964, n. p. 36, 966, n. 10; Stengel, *Kultusaltertumer*[3], 63. For Rome, *cf.* Marquardt, *Staatsverw.* iii[2], 180; Wissowa, *Relig. der Römer*[2], 416, n. 6. Macrobius (iii, 5, 8) is very explicit: 'observatum est a sacrificantibus ut, si hostia, quae ad aras duceretur, fuisset vehementius reluctata, ostendissetque se invitam altaribus admoveri, amoveretur, quia invito deo offeri eam putabant. quae autem stetisset oblata, hanc volenti numini dari existimabant.'

[8] For instance, at the temple of Aphrodite on Mount Eryx: Aelian, *de nat. anim.* i, 50. Other examples have been collected by Weinreich, *Studien zu Martial*, 1928, 134, 137 ff., 172, and by Robertson Smith, *op. cit.*, 309, n. 1 (*cf.* S. A. Cook's note on p. 602).

[9] Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mir. ausc.* 137 [149]. Another form of the story occurs in Apollonius Paradoxographus, c. 13 (Nilsson, *Griech. Feste*, 1906, 16; *cf.* 58, 437).

[10] This tale was often repeated: Plut. *Lucull.* 10; Appian, *Mithr.* 75; Porphyry, *De abstinentia*, i, 25; Obsequens, *Prodig.* 121.

army had reached the other bank, one of them ' went to a rock which was held sacred to the goddess, stood on it, and lowering its head as they are made to do with ropes, offered itself to Lucullus to be sacrificed.'[11]

Thus the belief that certain animals came of their own accord to their place of sacrifice was widespread in Anatolia, and it is not surprising that survivals of it are found in Christian times. A few years ago I discussed the institution recorded in the *Acts of St. Athenogenes*, whose relics were preserved in the monastery of Pedachtoe to the north of Sebasteia (Sivas) in Pontus.[12] Every year on the anniversary of his martyrdom a hind entered the church with her fawn, and the fawn was killed and eaten by the congregation at a banquet. This custom represented the sacrifices of deer which hunters of pagan times used to make to the ποτνία θηρῶν, the guardian of the wild, who was worshipped in Greece as Artemis and in Cappadocia as Ma.[13] Between the story given by the biographer of this Pontic saint and the practice still surviving in the nineteenth century at Ilori, the similarity is striking.

If Lucullus' cow was sacred to Anaïtis, who had a celebrated temple at Eriza in Acisilene,[14] the ox at Ilori belonged to the Persian god who is often associated with her—Mithra. That is the clear indication of the strange belief that on the day of his festival an ox was stolen by St. George ; for Mithra bears the special title of βουκλόπος θεός.[15] A hymn addressed to the *mystes* whom the Father had initiated by the ritual handshake[16] began with the line

Μύστα βοοκλοπίης συνδέξιε Πατρὸς ἀγαυοῦ,

[11] Plut. *Lucull.* 24, p. 507e : *καὶ γίνεται σημεῖον αὐτῷ χρηστὸν ἅμα τῇ διαβάσει· βόες ἱεραὶ νέμονται Ἱερσίας Ἀρτέμιδος, ἣν μάλιστα θεῶν οἱ πέραν Εὐφράτου βάρβαροι τιμῶσι· χρῶνται δὲ ταῖς βουσὶ πρὸς θυσίαν μόνον, ἄλλως δὲ πλάζονται κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἄφετοι, χαράγματα φέρουσαι τῆς θεοῦ λάμπαδα, καὶ λαβεῖν ἐξ αὐτῶν, ὅταν δεηθῶσιν, οὐ πάνυ ῥᾴδιόν ἐστιν οὐδὲ μικρᾶς πραγματείας. τούτων μία, τοῦ στρατοῦ διαβάντος τὸν Εὐφράτην, ἐλθοῦσα πρός τινα πέτραν ἱερὰν τῆς θεοῦ νομιζομένην ἐπ' αὐτῆς ἕστη καὶ καταβαλοῦσα τὴν κεφαλήν, ὥσπερ αἱ δεσμῷ κατατεινόμεναι, θῦσαι τῷ Λευκόλλῳ παρέσχεν αὐτήν.*

[12] 'L'archevêche de Pédachtoé et le sacrifice du faon' in *Byzantion*, vi, 1931, 522 ff. Père Peeters has called my attention to the fact that St. Athenogenes is mentioned, as well as in the hagiographical literature, by Agathangelus, who relates that, when St. Gregory the Illuminator was returning from Caesarea in Armenia after his ordination, he brought with him the relics of St. John the Baptist and of St. Athenogenes (*cf.* Langlois, *Hist. Arm.* i, 174, 178, etc.; Markwart, *Südarmenien und die Tigrisquellen*, 289). *Cf.* Delehaye and Quentin, *Comm. du martyrologe hiéronymien*, 24 July (*AASS* November xi, p. 394).

[13] The tradition that at a certain festival, generally that of the prophet Elijah, a stag came to be sacrificed and was then divided among the faithful is found in many parts of Greece. *Cf.* Kyriakidès, Λαογραφία. Δέλτιον τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς λαογραφικῆς ἑταιρείας vi, 1917, 189–215 : M. Kazarow has also noticed it in several Thracian churches (P-W *s.v.* ' Thrake,' col. 488 ff.) and rightly compares the legend with the words used about Rhesos, the mounted hunter of Rhodope, by Philostratus (*Heroic.* 3, 16) : *σημεῖον δὲ εἶναι τοῦ θηρᾶν τὸν ἥρω τὰ τοὺς σῦς τοὺς ἀγρίους καὶ τὰς δορκάδας καὶ ὁπόσα ἐν τῷ ὄρει θήρια φοιτᾶν πρὸς τὸν βωμὸν τοῦ Ῥήσου κατὰ δύο ἢ τρία, θύεσθαι δὲ οὐδενὶ δεσμῷ συνεχόμενα καὶ παρέχειν τῇ μαχαίρᾳ ἑαυτά. Cf.* Seure, *Revue de philol.*, liv, 1928, p. 118.

[14] Strabo xi, p. 532 C ; Agathangelus in Langlois, *Hist. Arm.* i, 126 ff., 167 ff.

[15] Porphyry, *De antro nymph.* 18 : *καὶ ψυχαὶ δὲ εἰς γένεσιν ἰοῦσαι βουγενεῖς, καὶ βουκλόπος θεὸς ὁ τὴν γένεσιν λεληθότως ἀκούων.*

[16] Firmicus Maternus, *De errore prof. relig.* c. 4 : ' Virum vero *abactorem bovum* colentes sacra eius ad ignis transferunt potestatem, sicut propheta eius nobis tradidit dicens : Μύστα κ.τ.λ.' On the proper interpretation of this line see *Comptes rendus Acad. Inscr.*, 1934, 107.

and Commodian[17] rebukes the worshippers of the 'Invincible' for representing their god as a thief—

> Insuper et furem adhuc depingitis esse . . .
> Vertebatque boves alienos semper in antris,
> Sicut et Cacus, Vulcani filius, ille.

This feature of the legend is often depicted on monuments. Mithra grasping its hind-feet carries the bull on his back towards the holy cave where he will sacrifice it.[18] In the period when the meteorological interpretation of mythology was in fashion, the struggles of Hercules and Cacus, and of Herakles and Geryon, like that of Indra and Vritra in India, were explained as symbols of the storm, and the lowing cattle, penned captive in the darkness of the cave, were the wind-chased clouds which darken the sky and make it echo with the rumbling of the thunder.[19] But the custom which lived on at Ilori suggests an explanation of the legend which is not celestial but social. It goes back to an age when to steal the live-stock of a neighbouring tribe was a recognized feature of warfare, and when cattle-lifting was regarded not as a crime but as an honourable achievement not unbecoming even to a god. A similar outlook prevailed till recent times among the Bedouin of the Syrian desert. Plutarch's narrative perhaps allows us to go earlier still—to a time of hunting populations, when men caught wild buffalo and, after sacrificing them to their god, themselves ate the flesh which would impart to their bodies the strength of the animals.[20]

The myth of Mithra's theft of the bull did not find a place in the Avesta, and orthodox Zoroastrianism ignored or transformed it.[21] But to attribute a robbery of this sort to a god was so far from surprising in the eyes of Armenian Mazdeism that it appears again in an aetiological story designed to explain the religious duty of destroying noxious beasts. I quote from Thomas Ardzroûni, an historian who lived in the ninth and tenth centuries.[22]

> 'Zradasht [Zoroaster] relates that, when a war had begun between Ormuzd and Ahriman, the former felt the pangs of hunger and scoured the countryside in search of food. *He came upon an ox, which he stole.* Having killed it and hidden

[17] *Instruct.* i, 13.

[18] On the legend of Mithra and the Bull, and its representations, *cf. Mon. myst. Mithra*, i, 170. I am dealing with the subject again in connection with the Mithraeum of Doura-Europos, on which Yale University is to publish a special monograph.

[19] Bréal, *Hercule et Cacus, étude de mythologie comparée*, Paris, 1863; *cf.* Roscher, *Lexicon*, *s.v.* 'Hercules,' col. 2279, where this interpretation is still accepted.

[20] *Cf.* my *Religions orientales*,[4] 63 f. in connection with the *taurobolium*. There is no doubt that in the myth of Mithra and the Bull, as it occurred in the mysteries, the god had to overcome the animal, which tried to escape (*Mon. myst. Mithra*, i, 170). A reminiscence of the capture of wild bulls in Colchis may conceivably be preserved by the legend of the Argonauts, where the first test imposed on Jason is to tame and yoke some fire-breathing bulls with feet of bronze (P-W ii, col. 766, 32). The same origin may perhaps be ascribed to a peculiar rite observed at Kynaitha in Arcadia according to Pausanias (viii, 19, 1): Διονύσου ἐστὶν ἐνταῦθα ἱερὸν καὶ ἑορτὴν ἄγουσιν ὥρᾳ χειμῶνος ἐν ᾗ λίπα ἀλληλιμμένοι ἄνδρες ἐξ ἀγέλης βοῶν ταῦρον, ὃν ἂν σφίσιν αὐτὸς ἐπὶ νοῦν ὁ θεὸς ποιήσῃ, ἀράμενοι κομίζουσι πρὸς τὸ ἱερόν. θυσία τοιαύτη σφίσι καθέστηκε. Nilsson (*Griech. Feste*, 299) compares the sacrifice in Atlantis (Plato, *Kritias*, 119c), where the bull was to be hunted ἄνευ σιδήρου ξύλοις καὶ βρόχοις.

[21] *Cf. Mon. myst. Mithra*, i, 171, n. 7.

[22] Brosset, *Historiens Arméniens*, St. Petersburg, 1874, i, 21 (Ardzroûni, i, ch. 3).

it under a heap of stones, he waited till dusk to carry home the product of his theft and assuage his hunger. When evening fell, he was greatly happy and made to fill himself with food ; but he found the ox spoiled, devoured by lizards, spiders, stellions and flies, which had made his victim their prey.'

The Armenian and Georgian belief in the theft of oxen by a god is thus the mythological reflection of very primitive social conditions which long continued in the eastern parts of Asia Minor. The mysteries of Mithra changed its meaning by identifying the stolen animal with the First-created Bull, whose death the Mazdeans supposed to have caused the birth of plants and beasts, and who must come to life again at the end of the world for his fat to be mixed with the draught which would give men immortality.[23] But these high religious speculations were beyond the ken of folklore, and at Ilori the story was preserved in its simplest and most naïve form.

St. George is an heir to the legend of Mithra, nor is it surprising that the saint who was the protector of the Byzantine armies, the Τροπαιοφόρος, should have taken the place of the god who watched over the Roman soldiery. Ilori lies near the Colchian coast which, after belonging to the kingdom of Mithridates, was occupied by imperial garrisons, and it is quite close to Sebastopolis (Dioscurias)—a place strongly held in Hadrian's time and which was still an outpost of the Empire under Justinian.[24] Now recent discoveries have shown that the troops on the eastern frontier were not behind those on the Danube and the Rhine in their devotion to the Persian god, who was assimilated to *Sol invictus*.[25] In Asia Minor, Mithra, daring alike as warrior and hunter, was mounted on a horse,[26] and thus he resembled the Cappadocian saint, an officer of the Roman army, whom from the fifth century onwards the hagiographers pictured to themselves on a white charger.[27] In East and West alike,[28] this dazzling coat was given by artists to George's steed throughout the Middle Age. During the tenth century it appears in the frescoes of the rock-churches of Cappadocia, which contain some of the earliest representations so far known of the saint transfixing the dragon with his spear,[29] and the convention was maintained down to the artists of the Renascence[30]: though he has become an

[23] *Mon. myst. Mithra*, i, 187 ff.

[24] Arrian, *Peripl. P. Eux.* 10; *cf.* P-W *s.v.* 'Dioskurias,' col. 1124.

[25] I shall be dealing with this point in connection with the Mithraeum of Doura-Europos ; see p. 67, n. 18.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] The earliest evidence appears to be that of the *Miracle of Theopistos*, which was set down in Cappadocia [*cf. infra*, p. 70 f.], Aufhauser, *Miracula S. Georgii* (Leipzig, 1913), 53, 8 ; 57, 2 : ἐφ' ἵππου λευκοῦ καθεζόμενος. *Cf. Mirac. de mansionario, ibid.*, p. 159, 11 : 'candidum praecepit conscendere equum.' For the period of the Crusades *cf. AASS*, April iii, p. 153 ff. ; Budge, *George of Lydda*, London, 1930, p. 38.

[28] As far as Ethiopia ; *cf.* Budge, *op. cit.*, pl. i, miniature of MS. B. Mus. Orient. 715, f. 2b.

[29] G. de Jerphanion, *Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*, i, 608, notes on pp. 482, 495 ; *cf.* pl. 135, 1 ; 187, 2. At vol. ii, p. 323 he adduces (after Myslivec, *Byzantinoslavica* v, 1933–4, 373 f.) a relief, dated to A.D. 916, from Ashtumar on Lake Van, which already shows the fight with the dragon.

[30] A large number of examples taken from miniatures, frescoes and pictures may be found in Johnny Roosval, *Nya Sankt Göraus Studier*, Stockholm, 1924 [in Swedish, with an English summary], pl. 2 ff. In addition may be mentioned a window in the Cathedral of Chartres (thirteenth century) published by Y. Delaporte and E. Ouvré, *Les vitraux de la cath. de Ch.*, 1926, 511, and pl. 269. [I owe this note to the Marquise de Maillé.]

armour-laden Italian knight, Raphael's St. George in the Musée du Louvre (1500–1502) still keeps his snow-white mount.[31] It has been supposed that painters chose this spotless hue for symbolical reasons: 'the champion of Purity must, they held, have been carried to victory by a charger ethereal and splendid as a summer cloud.' Such was Ruskin's view.[32] But it is established that in both literature and art the great martyr of Cappadocia is first found mounted thus in Cappadocia itself—that is, in a region steeped in Iranian beliefs; and consequently it would seem more likely that the Christian saint was given his white charger simply because white was the colour of the sacred horses of the Mazdeans and in particular of the horses of the Sun.[33] The great popularity of St. George in a wide variety of lands is probably to be explained by the existence of earlier mounted gods before his arrival: he attracted to himself the devotion which previously they had received. Just as he became the successor of Mithra in the parts beneath the Caucasus, so in the Balkans he took the place of the 'Thracian horseman,' whose reliefs still sometimes serve as icons in churches dedicated to the Christian saint.[34]

[31] In Italy almost at the same time Carpaccio broke with the age-old tradition by giving St. *Giorgio dei Genovesi* (Genoa, 1914), 96; Roosval, degli Schiavoni at Venice (1502–1507): *cf.* Ruskin, *l.c.* in the next note; Orlando Grosso, *Il San Giorgio dei Genovesi* (Genoa, 1914) 96; Roosval, *op. cit.*, pl. 24. In Germany this black horse appeared about 1480 in a picture by Friedrich Herlin (Nördlingen Städtisches Museum): *cf.* Roosval, pl. 13.

[32] J. Ruskin, *St. Mark's Rest*, 233 (=*Works*, ed. by Cook and Wedderburn, xxiv, 383).

[33] In the Avesta the chariot of Mithra is drawn by four white horses with trappings of gold and silver (*Mihir Yasht* xxxi, 125; vol. ii, 175, Darmesteter). Herodotus vi, 40: ἅρμα Διὸς [= Ahura-Mazda] ἵπποι εἵλκον λευκοὶ ὀκτώ. Q. Curtius iii, 3, 11: 'currum Iovi sacratum albentes vehebant equi.' Xen. *Cyr.* viii, 3, 12: ἅρμα λευκὸν Διὸς ἱερόν . . . Ἡλίου ἅρμα λευκόν. The *magi* sacrifice white horses to the Strymon (Herodotus vii, 113), and Mithridates in Pontus makes an offering to Poseidon λευκῶν ἵππων ἅρμα καθεὶς εἰς τὸ πέλαγος (Appian, *Mithr.* 70). So too in the Syriac Alexander-Romance (iii, 18, p. 234, Budge), having reached the shore of the Indian Ocean the king 'sacrificed a large number of white horses to Poseidon.' In Heliodorus x, 6, on the orders of the King Hydaspes the priests Ἡλίῳ τέθριππον λευκὸν ἐπῆγον. *The Treasure-Cave*, a Syriac *apocryphon* or the sixth century, relates that King Sîsan caused a white horse to be carved and set it by a spring in Adharbaijān so that the bathers prayed to it, from which it would appear that the Persians had a cult of this horse (C. Bezold, *Die Schatzhöhle*, 136—translation on p. 33).—So too according to Persian beliefs other miraculous animals (rams, bulls) which appeared on fixed days and from which the future was foretold were white (Albiruni, *Chronology of Nations*, trans. Sachau, London, 1879, 211, 213) —The Greeks too talk of white horses ridden by certain gods or harnessed to their chariots (Bochart, *Hierozoicon*, ed. Rosenmüller, 1793, i, 44); and though they rarely sacrificed horses, when they did so, it had always to be a white horse (Stengel, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*, 157, 161, and *Kultusaltertümer*,[3] 1920, 152). The triumphators at Rome entered the city in a chariot drawn by white horses, in imitation of the chariot of Jupiter or of the Sun (Livy, v, 23, 5; Plut. *Camillus* 7: *cf.* Bochart, *loc. cit.*; Marquardt, *Staatsverwaltung*, ii,[2] 586); and even among the Germans the horses used for divination were white (Tac. *Germ.* 10). It is probable that at least in some cases there is Eastern, and more particularly Persian, influence (Stengel, *Kultusalt.*[3] 136, n. 7), but the question needs closer examination: it has little importance for our present subject. Père de Jerphanion reminds me of *Revelation* xix, 11 ff., where the king of kings—that is, the triumphant Messiah—and his heavenly host are mounted on white horses, as also is the first of the four horsemen—the conqueror—in vi, 2. Should we suppose that from these passages the spotless coat of St. George's steed is derived? More probably both the author of the *Apocalypse* and the hagiographers chose this colour because it was traditional for the horses of the 'Invincible' god and of successful warriors.

[34] Alb. Dumont, *Mélanges d'archéol. réunis par Homolle*, 1892, 212, already noticed the fact and gave some examples (p. 328, nos. 22, 23): *cf.* Rostovtzeff, *Storia economica dell' impero*, 292. M. Kazarow has kindly sent me some interesting details about the cult of St. George and its connection with the Thracian hero. 'Eine Kapelle des heiligen Georgs befindet sich östlich vom Dorfe Zabernovo (Bezirk Malko-Tirnovo in Süd-Bulgarien). In der berühmten Nische die als Altar dient, ist ein antikes Relief des thrakischen Heros aufgestellt, das als Ikone des heiligen Georgs verehrt wird, vor dem auch Kerzen angezündet werden (Škorpil, *Beschreibung der Altertümer des*

We may ask whether the story of Mithra and the Bull has not left other traces in the enormous literature which tells in prose and verse the praises of St. George and of his miraculous powers. In dealing with the earliest *Acta*, set down in Cappadocia during the fifth century, I showed that an incident in which an ox was brought back to life when touched by the saint's magic wand, and other similar stories, become more intelligible in the light of the high value set upon this farm animal by Mazdeism and of the resurrection of the First-created Bull by Mithra.[35] But other stories of the hagiographers are more closely connected with the idea of the βουκλόπος θεός. This figure was not only the brigand who steals his neighbour's cattle but also the hero who brings back to the stall what enemies have carried off;[36] and in a more general way he became the guardian god who prevented the herds from straying. This function as the countryman's protector,[37] who recovers the beasts that have been lost, passed to George; and it is to be seen in a charming tale preserved in the *Miracles* of the saint.[38] In conclusion I will give it briefly here; for it is easy to see that what we have is a popular pagan story, scarcely christianized, which before it was transferred to the Christian Knight was undoubtedly told in the Anatolian villages of Mithra 'lord of the wide champaign.'

In the days of the Emperor Theodosius[39] there lived in Cappadocia a peasant called Theopistos, who went one morning with his slaves to work in his field. Before taking his afternoon nap he unyoked his oxen to let them graze, but when he woke up they had disappeared. Theopistos looked for them till nightfall without success; and then for a whole week, but in vain. In despair he prayed to George, the hero of Cappadocia, and vowed that, if he restored his team, he would offer him one of the two oxen as a sacrifice.

Schwarzenmeergebietes, i, 79). Interessant sind auch die von mir angeführten Beispiele, *Arch. Anzeiger*, 1926, p. 9; 1931, p. 331.' M. Kazarow then remarks that it is very doubtful whether (as Dumont suggested) the artistic type of St. George killing the dragon can have been inspired by that of the 'Thracian horseman'; for it was probably created in the East and the earliest examples of it in Bulgaria date from the twelfth century. He goes on—'Ich möchte noch hinzufügen dass dieser Heilige bei uns sehr populär ist. Die Bauern verehren ihn besonders als Beschützer des Ackerbaues und der Viehzucht—auch Heros hatte diese Eigenschaften (*Realenc.*, vi A, 483); er gibt Regen und Fruchtbarkeit; viele Volksliede besingen ihn, insbesondere seinen Kampf mit den Drachen (*Lamja*), der in verschiedenen Varianten erzählt wird. Im wirtschaftlichen Leben des Volkes sind viele Bräuche mit der Feier des Heiligen verknüpft. In der Zeit vor diesem Tage (6 Mai) wird von den Bauern kein Lamm geschlachtet, erst am Tage des Heiligen wird ein Lamm als Opfer dargebracht, vom Priester geweiht und erst dann gegessen. Ueber die Beziehung des Heros mit dem heiligen Georg hat bei uns niemand geschrieben, so viel mir bekannt ist.'

[35] *Cf. Revue de l'histoire des religions*, cxiv, 1936, 25.

[36] *Yasht*, x, 22, 86 (vol. ii, 465—Darmesteter): 'La vache emmenée captive l'invoque à son secours soupirant vers l'étable (*ou* le troupeau). Quand notre héros, Mithra, maître des vastes campagnes . . . nous fera-t-il atteindre l'étable? Poussée dans le repaire de la Druj, quand me fera-t-il retourner dans le droit chemin?' *Ibid.* x, 9, 38 (p. 453): 'Sinistres sont les demeures où habitent les Mithro-druj et les méchants meurtriers du juste. Sinistre est le chemin de captivité où marche le boeuf qui pait dans les vallons des hommes Mithro-druj: traîné sur la route, il s'arrête laissant des larmes couler le long de ses joues.' *Cf. Mon. myst. Mithra*, i, 171, n. 7.

[37] As in Bulgaria: *cf. supra*, p. 69, note 34.

[38] *Miracula S. Georgii*, ed. Aufhauser, Leipzig, 1913, pp. 44–64.

[39] The story must have taken this form a little later than the reign of Theodosius I, A.D. 379–395, (*cf.* Aufhauser, *Das Drachenwunder des heiligen Georg* (Munich), 1911, 28); that is to say, it goes back to the fifth century like the oldest of the *Acta*.

Then the saint appeared to him in a dream and showed him the spot where the beasts were quietly feeding. But the farmer, instead of offering him one of the two draught-oxen, contented himself with slaughtering a kid. Next night George appeared to him again and bade him fulfil his promise; but still the rustic could not bring himself to do so and only killed a sheep and a lamb. Then the angry martyr came a third time and threatened to burn his farm if he did not sacrifice his two oxen, his twenty sheep and his ten pigs, saying that in return, when the offering had been made, he would be his guest at dinner. Theopistos was terrified, but when he awoke he persuaded himself that it was only a phantom (φάνταϲμα), and not George, which had spoken to him in his dream. Then, when he fell asleep again, he saw George, this time mounted on a white charger and holding the Cross, renewing his threats, which filled him with such fear that he resolved to sacrifice all his stock. Oxen, sheep and pigs were killed; a great table was laid with bread and wine; the priests chanted liturgical hymns, as befits a sacrifice; and all the villagers were summoned to the meal. And then during the feast the 'Cappadocian Count' arrived, still on his white steed, with a goodly company of knights. He multiplied the loaves, made the wine abound and, having mounted again, caused the bones of the animals which the guests had eaten to be brought. At his prayer all the beasts came back to life—in number threefold. Thereafter Theopistos lived happily with his wife Eusebia, and their children were many; for that is how fairy-tales always end.[40]

[40] I owe my hearty thanks to Mr. Hugh Last for his trouble in translating this article.